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ABSTRACT

This study explored students' use of high school counselors, and more specifically, the effect of a black counselor on the helper preference of students. A questionnaire composed of 21 items concerning personal, educational and vocational problems was presented to sophomore and junior students from the following types of high schools: (1) white student body, private, small city, no black teachers or counselors; (2) integrated, urban, black teachers and counselors; (3) rural, all white, no black teachers or counselors; and (4) white, small city, black and white teachers and counselors. Several limitations of the study were outlined and taken into account as indicative of the need for further in-depth research prior to drawing definitive conclusions from the present study. One of the most critical concerns indicated by the results was the low image students have of counselors as relevant helpers in personal-social problem areas. Of the results discussed, it was strongly suggested that black counselors would be well accepted in all but the rural school. (TL)

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WHITE COUNSELEE EXPRESSED PREFERENCE

for

HELP IN SOLVING DIFFERENT TYPES OF PROBLEMS

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White Counselee Expressed Preference
for Help in Solving Different Types of Problems

Racial differences and its effect upon the counseling relationship has become a current topic in counseling. Most of the writings have dealt with the question of whether a white counselor can deal with any degree of effectiveness with a black student. There is also a question as to what the attitude of the white student is toward a black counselor. This exploratory study sought to answer the following questions: 1. What effect does the presence of a black counselor in a school have on the helper preferences of the students? 2. Does the size and type of school make any difference in the helper preferences of high school students? 3. Does the type of problem in any way influence the student's selection of a helper.

Before considering the results of this particular study, a review of the available literature suggests that bi-racial counseling dyads under certain circumstances hinders the establishment of effective student-counselor relationships and that the majority of students will not seek out counselors for help with personal, social-emotional problems.

Vontress (1967) asserts that anti-white attitudes are pervasive among negroes. These feelings have been attested to by nearly all articles of recent vintage dealing with this topic, Hughes (1962), Baldwin (1963), Silberman (1964), Clark (1965), Farmer (1965), Franklin (1967), Grant (1968) and Grier (1969). The fact that whites hold anti-black attitudes can be backed up with as much written or performance evidence (freedom marches, school desegregation, police and school confrontations, etc.). The problem is expanded by Vontress (1967) when he states that white females have an in-born fear of black males and respond to them with a fear emotion. This raises the question as to what kind of interpersonal relationship can develop between white girls and black counselors.

In a later study Vontress (1969, p.3) states that "in some cases, the black counselor may be accepted completely because he is black, but if he is unable to assist the client with the problems he experiences, then his blackness will be of fleeting value. Thus, race and resultant attitudes are initial barriers in the counseling relationship."

Fibush states that the problem is one of perception: How the counselee and counselor perceive each other? (1965) When the counselee senses that the counselor is able, despite racial differences, to understand not only apecial circumstances and problems and can identify with them in his attempt to meet his emotional and material needs, the kind of rapport can be established which leads to the solving of many problems.

Similarly, Lewis (1969) suggests that one's attitude toward another person simply because that individual is of a particular color impedes human relationships. He points out that effective counseling can occur in a bi-racial situation; however, the counselor must convey to the counselee his acceptance and understanding. Phillips (1960) indicates that white counselors have immense barriers to penetrate before they can successfully counsel Negro students. Locke (1969) also believes that racism exists because of a breakdown in understanding and that the properly educated counselor should

not show any evidence of racism. Locke proposes that if the content of the counseling session has racial overtones, the relationship should be one similar to that of dealing with the majority of social-emotional problems.

Stump (1968) found that "cross cultural" factors must be considered in understanding an individual's development--namely, that of vocational development. One must consider how an individual gains his identity in a specific culture, how institutions and cultural change influence vocational development.

Jourard and Lasakow (1958) urge counselors not to be so concerned about racial differences but to concentrate on the personality structure of the counselee. The research of Jourard and Lasakow implies that counselors should find it easiest to establish a meaningful relationship with white females, first; white males, second; black females, next and black males, last.

An encouraging report from Chick (1968) showed that white and black secondary school counselors participating in a workshop consisting of small group interactions produced a group spirit without regard to race. The group studied the problems of desegregation, eliciting much participant interest.

The essence of most writers' thoughts on this subject may best be summed up in the words of Robert Katz (1963, p. 3): "It is common experience that one finds it more difficult to establish empathy with those who are different from himself." As Vontress (1967) points out, it is vitally important that white counselors be aware of basic differences between black culture and the typical white middle class culture. He suggests that a white counselor should have little difficulty establishing rapport with the black middle class student. One might ask if the same situation would hold true for the black counselor from the ghetto trying to work with middle class white youth. The problem of black-white barriers in counseling dyads may be class difference more than racial. There seems to be consensus that there are cultural barriers to a counseling relationship. Agreement ceases (Lewis, 1969; Locke, 1969) as to what constitutes proper training and what would be a suitable definition for racism.

In regard to the topic of counselors being selected for help with various kinds of problems, it is found that personal emotional-social problem situations are not frequently discussed with counselors by students. Roemmich and Schmidt (1962), in a study asking the question, "Who assisted you most with making college plans?", found that 48% selected parents, 30%--no one, 9%--counselor, 8%--friends, and 4%--teachers. These authors also found that only one out of twenty received help from counselors in selecting a college. From their study, Roemmilh and Schmidt concluded that no school people appear to be the signigicant group who assist students.

In a study with seventh graders, Parker(1963) asked students to indicate which among six choices(teacher or counselor, father, mother, older brother or sister, friend, other adult) they would ask to help them plan their high school program. 50% of the female students selected mother, 24%--father, and 14%--teacher or counselor. For boys, fathers were selected by 47% of the seventh graders, mothers by 25% and teachers or counselors by 15%. Again the preference for a helper was for out of school assistance in help with a high school program.

Keeney (1968) found in a study of college students' preferences for counselor help that choices for preferred counselors were problem and sex oriented. Females hesitated more than males to seek help with problems related to sex, while all students sought help more often for problems of anger than for sex. However, males expected to benefit from counselor help less than did females. It was found that the values and experience of the counselor were most important while age and sex of the counselor were of low priority. In dealing with sex problems, males more often than females preferred working with a counselor of the same sex and one with whom they were personally acquainted.

Larson and Rice (1967) conducted a study with three types of students, aggressive, well-adjusted, and underachievers, in which they attempted to find out where these students went with their problems. From the aggressive group, 23% said they would go to a counselor; for the well-adjusted--33%; and for the underachievers--34%. Thus, it is quite obvious that only a minority of students place counselors at the top of the list in terms of their ability to help them with a problem.

Previous writings on the two topics central to this study indicate that multi-racial factors are a legitimate concern for counselor education as is the perception students have of counselors as potential helpers. In the following section limitations to this particular study are discussed. Following the limitations are included the summary data as well as relevant student comments.

Limitations:

An obvious limitation of this study was the narrow choice of possible helpers given to the responding students. It is possible that the helper actually preferred by the students was not included as a choice on this listing. The list of helpers was limited to within school choices and to those helpers with whom the student would have the greatest amount of contact. It was felt that limiting the number of choices and the number of items would expedite the student's responding to the questionnaire and also increase the degree of honesty with which they responded.

A second limitation of the study, and of others asking for attitudinal responses to questions dealing with preferred helpers is that there is no way of checking the honesty of the response. Even though complete anonymity was preserved during the completion of the questionnaire the question of whether students responded congruently is a real one. With the emphasis on improving race relations there seems to be pressure on many students to respond in a certain direction when dealing with racially related attitudinal questions. One cannot be sure how much "response set" in this direction was involved in this study.

Another limitation of the study was the limited knowledge students had of counselor role and function in some of the participating schools. In the small, rural schools counselors had been added to the staff only during the past few years and many of the students may have had no direct contact with the school counselor. This comment on the status quo in some schools may not be as much a limitation on this study as it is a relevant comment on the unclear role of school counselors in many districts.

Methods:

In order to obtain a broad sample of white high school students four different types of high schools were indentified. These were: (A) white student body, private, small city, no black teachers or counselors, (B) integrated, urban, black teachers and counselors, (C) rural, all-white, no black teachers or counselors, and (D) white, small city, black and white teachers and counselors. In the integrated schools responses from black students were eliminated for purposes of this study.

A questionnaire was devised containing twenty-one problems faced by high school students. These twenty-one items were divided into three categories: personal, educational, and vocational. Placement of items into categories was done by Master's Degree students in Guidance and Counseling. These same graduate students were asked to select from the twenty-one problems the ten which they believed to be most important in terms of their own need for information as a prospective school counselor. Following the selection of the questionnaire items and the identification of schools meeting the prescribed criteria the instrument was administered to selected sophomore or junior classes in the participating high schools.

For each of the six possible helpers percentages for each selected as first choice by the respondents were computed. Rank orders were also computed for each item for each of the six helper types.

Student Comments:

"Being black or white doesn't make any difference. Whatever the problem I would always go to a friend or parents before I would go to a counselor or teacher."

"A person's color really doesn't matter--it's their position to help."

"I would go to the person I think could answer my questions. I know more whites than blacks so I would probably, but not always, go to a white."

"I believe it is almost totally irrelevant whether a person be black or white. If you have a problem color shouldn't interfere with it."

"I'm not prejudiced but if there was one black counselor and one white counselor in my school I would go to the white counselor. This doesn't mean I don't like the black. Besides, if I really need help, I will go to my parents."

"If I needed an answer to an educational problem it wouldn't make any difference what color the person was. If it was a personal problem like sex, I would want to see a white counselor."

"Most problems I wouldn't discuss with anybody. Some things are better worked out by onesself."

"I wouldn't ever go to a counselor. I don't feel they know you personally."

"I don't think counselors white or black are very good. They won't give you the facts. They talk around in circles. Most of the time they're not in their office, and, if they are, they look at you like you're a big bother."

"The only time I would go to a ccunselor (black or white) is for college information, job information, or changing classes. If it was a personal problem most kids I know would go to a friend, not a teacher or counselor."

"I would never go to a black person for any kind of information, even life or death. I have never talked to a black person and never hope to."

"I'm usually not in contact with a counselor and I hope never to be."

"It does not make any difference to me whether a person is white or black as long as they are qualified."

"Who you would talk to in certain situations depends on the circumstances. For god's sake it doesn't make any difference if they're black or white. It's the person that counts."

"I don't care what race my assistance comes from. I'd just rather have a counselor first, then a teacher, then a friend."

"What difference does it make who we go to to get information, as long as we get it and it is correct."

"In some cases I would go to a teacher before a friend or counselor. Race would have nothing to do with my choice except if I wanted to be in a group where learning more about blacks was the goal."

"It doesn't make any difference to me. If a black counselor was better than the white counselor, I would go to the negro."

"It makes no difference in color and in most cases I would discuss the problem with someone outside the school. I would never talk to a counselor, and I wouldn't make decisions on a friend's opinion."

"It doesn't make a difference what color the person is. It's how well they know me and try to help."

"I don't see what difference it makes whether a person is white, black or purple. If you know someone well and have a problem it will hardly make a difference."

TABLE I

PREFERENCES FOR HELP WITH DIFFERING CONCERNS

Item 1. You are interested in participating in a group which has as its focus improving relations between races. Who would you most want to be the group leader?

Source of Help	School Group A N=78	Rank	School Group B N=118	Rank	School Group C N=114	Rank	School Group D N=72	Rank
A. Black Counselor	53.7	1	42.9	1	41.1	1	50.0	1
B. White Counselor	14.6	2.5	28.6	2	25.0	2	13.9	3
C. Black Friend	12.2	4	7.9	5	5.4	5.5	13.9	3
D. White Friend	2.4	5.5	9.5	4	10.7	4	13.9	3
E. White Teacher	2.4	5.5	11.1	3	5.4	5.5	2.8	6
F. Black Teacher	14.6	2.5	0.0	6	12.5	3	5.6	5

Item 2. You are facing a problem with a white teacher that makes doing well in his class difficult. If you wanted to discuss this problem with someone to whom would you be most apt to go?

	A Percent	Rank	B Percent	Rank	C Percent	Rank	D Percent	Rank
A. White Counselor	51.2	1	61.5	1	56.1	1	55.6	1
B. Black Counselor	22.0	2	21.5	2	5.3	5	13.9	2
C. White Friend	4.9	4	4.6	4	7.0	4	11.1	3
D. Black Friend	2.4	5.5	0.0	6	1.8	6	8.3	4.5
E. Another white Teacher	17.1	3	10.8	3	17.5	2	8.3	4.5
F. Black Teacher	2.4	5.5	1.5	5	12.3	3	2.8	6

Item 3. You need information about colleges you might want to attend after high school. Who would you feel could give you the best information?

	A Percent	Rank	B Percent	Rank	C Percent	Rank	D Percent	Rank
A. Black Counselor	16.2	2	8.5	2	10.9	2	11.1	2
B. White Counselor	75.7	1	76.3	1	83.6	1	77.7	1
C. Black Teacher		5.5	3.4	5	3.6	3	0.0	6
D. White Teacher	2.7	4	6.8	4	0.0	5.5	2.8	4.5
E. Black Friend	0.0	5.5	0.0	6	1.8	4	2.8	4.5
F. White Friend	5.4	3	5.0	3	0.0	5.5	5.6	3

Item 4. You are becoming seriously involved with a person of the opposite sex and don't know whether or not to get married immediately. If you were to discuss this problem with somebody on the list below, who would it be?

	A		B		C		D	
	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank
A. White Counselor	35.9	2	25.5	2	38.6	2	29.0	2
B. Black Counselor	7.7	3	9.1	3.5	5.3	3	0.0	6
C. White Friend	46.2	1	54.5	1	50.9	1	45.2	1
D. Black Friend	5.1	4	9.1	3.5	0.0	6	12.9	3
E. White Teacher	2.6	5.5	0.0	6	3.5	4	9.7	4
F. Black Teacher	2.6	5.5	1.8	5	1.8	5	3.2	5

Item 5. You are planning your courses for the next year. Who do you feel could be of the most help to you?

	A		B		C		D	
	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank
A. Black Counselor	34.2	1.5	24.2	2	16.1	2	25.7	2
B. White Counselor	34.2	1.5	64.5	1	58.9	1	62.9	1
C. White Friend	0.0	6	1.6	5.5	5.4	4	0.0	5
D. Black Friend	10.5	4	3.2	4	1.8	6	0.0	5
E. Black Teacher	13.2	3	1.6	5.5	3.6	5	0.0	5
F. White Teacher	7.9	5	4.8	3	14.3	3	11.4	3

Item 6. You are concerned because a group you have recently joined is involved with smoking "pot", getting high on pills, etc. Who would you be most willing to discuss this concern with?

	A		B		C		D	
	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank
A. Black Counselor	26.3	2	17.2	3	8.8	4	17.6	3
B. White Counselor	10.5	4	22.4	2	31.6	2	26.5	2
C. Black Teacher	2.6	6	3.4	5.5	3.5	6	0.0	6
D. White Teacher	13.2	3	6.9	4	10.5	3	2.9	5
E. White Friend	42.1	1	44.8	1	40.4	1	41.2	1
F. Black Friend	5.2	5	3.4	5.5	5.3	5	11.8	4

Item 7. You feel discriminating remarks are being made against you in the school cafeteria. To whom would you go to talk about this problem?

	A		B		C		D	
	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank
A. Black Counselor	16.3	3	26.7	2.5	12.5	3	19.4	3
B. White Counselor	32.6	1	31.7	1	19.6	2	33.3	2
C. White Teacher	4.7	6	6.7	5	8.9	4.5	2.8	5.5
D. Black Teacher	7.0	5	0.0	6	0.0	6	2.8	5.5
E. Black Friend	11.6	4	8.3	4	8.9	4.5	5.6	4
F. White Friend	27.9	2	26.7	2.5	50.0	1	36.1	1

Item 8. You want to get to know yourself better--in terms of knowing your strengths and weaknesses. Rate the following in terms of you feeling about their being able to help you.

	A		B		C		D	
	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank
A. Black Counselor	25.0	2	21.3	3	12.5	4	8.6	3
B. White Counselor	40.0	1	23.0	2	17.9	2.5	34.3	2
C. Black Friend	7.5	4	6.6	5	17.9	2.5	5.7	4.5
D. White Friend	22.5	3	37.7	1	37.5	1	42.9	1
E. Black Teacher	0.0	6	3.3	6	3.6	6	2.9	6
F. White Teacher	5.0	5	8.2	4	10.7	5	5.7	4.5

Item 9. You have been accused of a crime you did not commit. Who would you want to talk to about this?

	A		B		C		D	
	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank
A. White Counselor	44.4	1	56.6	1	42.9	1	51.7	1
B. Black Counselor	19.4	3	15.1	2.5	8.9	3	10.3	4
C. White Friend	27.8	2	15.1	2.5	37.5	2	17.2	2
D. Black Friend	0.0	5.5	7.5	4	3.6	5	10.3	4
E. White Teacher	8.3	4	3.8	5	3.6	5	10.3	4
F. Black Teacher	0.0	5.5	1.9	6	3.6	5	0.0	6

Item 10. Your grades are becoming increasingly bad. You are interested in talking to someone about the reasons. Rate the following in the order in which you would select them for discussing this problem.

	A		B		C		D	
	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank
A. White Counselor	64.7	1	45.8	1	29.6	2	50.0	1
B. Black Counselor	8.8	3	10.2	3.5	7.4	4	13.3	3
C. White Teacher	20.6	2	25.4	2	44.4	1	33.3	2
D. Black Teacher	0.0	5.5	3.4	6	5.6	5	0.0	5.5
E. White Friend	5.9	4	10.2	3.5	11.1	3	3.3	4
F. Black Friend	0.0	5.5	5.1	5	1.9	6	0.0	5.5

School A - White, private, no black staff members.

School B - Integrated, Urban High School. Black and white staff members.

School C - Rural, all-white student body and staff.

School D - City, white student body, black and white counselors.

Results

1. In a group having as its focus improved relations among races, black counselors were chosen as the preferred group by students in all four types of high schools. One might deduce from this that schools planning to run group workshops, sensitivity session, etc should employ blacks to serve as group leaders for these activities. The findings of this study raise the question as to whether whites can function effectively as group leaders if the group goal is a greater understanding of minority peoples.

2. It can be concluded from student responses to such items as 3 and 5 that the perceived role of the school counselor in all four types of high schools is in college information giving and course planning. Students selecting either white or black counselors for help with these two kinds of concerns was as high as 94.5 percent for college information and up to 88.7 percent for course planning.

3. Contrasted to the high preference rate for counselors evidenced in item 2 (above) are the findings for items 4 and 6. In the case of item 4, problems with heterosexual relationships, the selection percentages for counselors ranged from a low of 29 percent for students in D type schools to a high of 43.9 percent for students in C type high schools. For help with concerns relating to smoking "pot" combined white and black counselor preferences ranged from a low of 36.8 percent for students in A type high schools to a high selection percentage of 44.1 for students in D type schools. For both the sexual concerns and the narcotic concerns white friends ranked number one as a preferred helper. We might ask^why students in four distinctly different high school populations rejected counselors as helpers for concerns of a personal nature.

4. Contrary to what might have been predicted the presence of black counselors in school types B and D did not appreciably increase the percentages of students who selected black counselors. This was especially evident for item 4 (heterosexual relationships) where in school type D not one student listed a black counselor as his first choice. Students in type D schools also ranked black counselors lower than all-white schools for items 8 and 9. A possible conclusion from this finding is that just placing a black counselor in a school does not assure his acceptance by the student body as a preferred helper. As is stated in many of the student comments, "It is the person that counts, not his race." For counselor educators to select counselor candidates on the basis that "Black is Beautiful" without giving significant attention to the candidates' personal qualities does not seem to be a way of significantly increasing the impact blacks will have on the field of counseling.

5. It has been suggested in the literature (Vontress, 1967) that one of the most difficult relationship problems for the white counselor and black counselees is the white female-black male counselee dyad. The findings of this study would tend to support this hypothesis as the selection percentages for black counselors on item 4 (heterosexual relationships) were among the lowest for any of the items. In school type D not a single student selected a black counselor for help with this particular problem. The fact that a large percentage of respondents from D-type schools were female and that the black counselor was male would appear to lend credence to this argument. In B-type schools where the available black helpers were both male and female the selection percentage (9.1) was considerably higher.

6. As would be expected, teachers ranked lowest of the available helpers for nearly all of the items. This finding would raise some questions as to the effectiveness of teachers in areas outside their defined classroom instuctional responsibilities. Additional study into the preparation program for teachers in terms of the relevance of helping dimensions needs to be investigated. With students rejecting both counselors and teachers as sources of help with personal, social concerns it raises the question as to what kind of person in a school setting is needed to fill this seemingly existing void.

7. A cursory look at the data for the ten items would lead one to conclude that the greatest reluctance to choose black helpers is in the rural type schools. It is perhaps the lack of contact with blacks for these groups and a suspicion of urban related social concerns which causes rural youth to respond in this way. For seven of the ten items black counselor selection percentages were lowest for the rural student. It would be interesting to speculate just how effective a minority group counselor would be with an all-white, rural population.

Summary:

As was suggested in a discussion of the limitations related to this study it would be a dire mistake to draw definitive conclusions without additional study. In the opinion of this writer one of the most critical concerns for counselor educators at the present time is to try to find out why high school students have such a low image of counselors as relevant helpers in personal-social problem areas. Rather than replicate questionnaire type studies such as this one it would seem more plausible to conduct in-depth field type studies in representative high schools sampling student opinion on their help needs with various kinds of problems. Field type studies would be costly and time consuming but it would seem to me that the data obtained would be of real significance. In addition to obtaining data on relationships between counselor and their student public, information also needs to be obtained from administrators, teachers, and parents as to their perceptions of the role and function of school counselors.

Creation of a relationship has been called indispensable if counseling is to be effective. Such terms as honesty, acceptance, understanding, and communication (Lewis, 1969) have been defined as precedent to success in a black-white counseling dyad. Certainly, this places a burden upon the counselor in training to become aware of his own attitudes toward different types of counselees, and also to take whatever means necessary to implement change within himself as well as in the school and community environment. This places a high priority on change agent training as part of a counselor education program. Such programs in this area as sponsored by the National

Training Laboratories appear most promising in assisting people to become effective change agents.

Obviously, the field of counseling and guidance faces problems in the 1970's which will make concerns of the past two decades seem rather trivial. Student unrest has permeated through the upper two levels of education, higher education and secondary education, and from the student comments quoted and from the data presented counselors,regardless of the race of their counselees or the problem presented have lost any of the charisma that in an earlier day they might have possessed. Paul Ehrlich's (1968) report on world problems might be an aparopriate analogy for if counseling and guidance don't establish priorities for action we, together with most of mankind, may not see the 80's.